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WILLIAM · MORRIS

BY · THE · COUNTESS · OF · WARWICK

THE
PILGRIM
BOOKS

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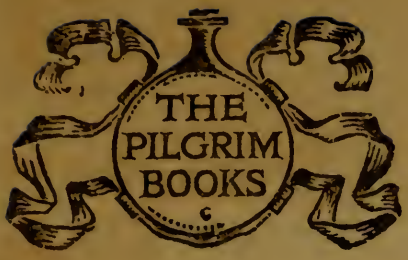

WILLIAM MORRIS

THE
PILGRIM BOOKS

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1. SHAKESPEARE
2. LAMB
3. WORDSWORTH
4. TENNYSON
5. RUSKIN
6. MORRIS

Others in Preparation

WILLIAM MORRIS
(Photo : Elliott & Fry)

W263

WILLIAM MORRIS

HIS HOMES AND HAUNTS

BY

THE COUNTESS OF WARWICK

WITH TWELVE DRAWINGS IN CRAYON BY
A. FORESTIER

AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK
DODGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
214-220 EAST 23RD STREET

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PREFACE

The examination of a great and arresting personality—whether it be a good or a bad one, as the world judges—is always a fascinating work. The human mind is the most complex, and therefore the most mysterious, thing in nature: the study of it the most difficult, and therefore the most engrossing of pursuits. Perhaps the subject of this book, William Morris, at once artist, poet, craftsman, manufacturer, and politician, presents one of the most elusive problems ever put before the student of human nature. Not only is his life-history fascinating by reason of its sheer diversity and comprehensiveness, but there is the satisfactory thought that, viewed as a whole, it reveals the accomplishment of the highest levels of the human flight. In the mind of the present writer, at least, Morris is a perfect expression of the type of personality for which the Utopian impulse of the reformer is forever seeking.

One can imagine a very satisfactory world if it were peopled to a considerable extent by men and women like William Morris. He seems to have gathered together into one harmonious whole the greater number of the accomplishments and virtues which are more commonly scattered separately among those of whom we are accustomed to think as cultured beings. Whether by the gift of heredity or the chances of

education, Morris focused in his own brain or soul—call it what you will—these diverse qualities of human excellence which are more usually doled out by Nature with a niggardly hand.

But then William Morris had all the good fairies on his side. He was dowered with a vivid imagination, which gave him one of the greatest artist-minds of the world; he was the possessor of a finely formed brain, which made him one of the most far-seeing of those political thinkers who have tried to lead their fellows; he was gifted with that somewhat indescribable quality called "common-sense" which enabled him to become effective and gave him success as a man of the world. As the man of business, as the artist and craftsman and poet, Morris came out a victor in honest and open competition with his fellows. As a politician he compelled them to listen to him; they were bound to argue, they quoted his words, they were forced to attempt a reply—although only a small minority of them took his advice to become Socialists. To compel people to listen is to be half-way along the road to political success; it is usually the next few generations that obey the far-seeing statesman: he cries in the wilderness of his own time, or preaches from the hilltops from which he sees the light that has yet to reach the valleys.

It is because the subject of this little book took so many aspects of life to be his province, that one feels pleasure in recalling his chief excellencies, in the hope that his life may be an illuminating picture of what

mankind might attain to if environment were only more rationally considered. It would be interesting to study and examine closely that environment which surrounded Morris. The elements seem fairly clear. There was, first of all, a happy and healthy childhood—not unduly trammelled by schools and teachers, but with more than usual freedom to roam about the woods and fields and study life at first hand. Perhaps a still more fundamental force in the making of the man was the absence of financial worry, the deadening weight of material cares. It would be difficult, probably, to overestimate the waste of useful human energy and skill due to no other cause than financial strain.

The student of Morris's environment would, I think, have to consider next the educational value of the art of the mediæval ages which had survived in English architecture as Morris knew it at Canterbury and round Marlborough, the art whose spirit then, at least, haunted Oxford. Perhaps the two visits to Normandy, which Morris made in his Oxford days, had as much to do with this side of his development as anything else on which we can lay a biographical hand. There was the lucky chance, too, that gave him a circle of delightful friends—though, of course, they became his friends because he was already a person of charm. But there is always this reaction between cause and effect; it is difficult to know which is which.

Perhaps, after all, the most interesting fact about the character of William Morris is that a man of individuality, marked almost to the verge of isolation,

one who seems, at the first glance, to be the individualist of individualists—should above all others declare his absolute belief that Socialism was the only system under which he could develop without discomfort and restraint. The reproach that their creed means the annihilation of the individual is so frequently hurled at the heads of Socialists, that it is useful to be able to retort with the example of Morris, who declared the present system is destroying the souls of men and reducing them to one dead level of mediocrity.

No one should rest content with a knowledge of the outlines of William Morris's life. He is a man who is worthy of the most detailed study. Fortunately, his life history has been written with rare sympathy by Mr. J. W. Mackail, whose two-volume "Life of William Morris" has been invaluable in selecting the biographical facts for this essay; an aid which is here gratefully acknowledged. But Morris, after all, is his own expounder. His books must be read, his arts and crafts must be seen and handled: only his own burning words and his own glowing colours, the jewels of his own lustre and design, can give a proper conception of one of the most intensely living beings of the nineteenth century. This is perhaps a strong expression of opinion, but it is not too strong where William Morris is concerned.

FRANCES EVELYN WARWICK.

Warwick Castle.
January 1912.

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TO THE

REV. CONRAD NOEL

TO WHOM THE MESSAGE OF WILLIAM MORRIS

APPEALS AS IT DOES TO ME

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"I will not cease from mental strife,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

WILLIAM MORRIS

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

On the 24th day of March 1834, at Elm House, Walthamstow, the country home of William Morris the elder, was born a son to his wife Emma, formerly Shelton. The official persons who recorded that event, and the neighbours who talked of it, had, quite naturally, not the slightest conception of its significance.

The boy was destined to be one of the outstanding men of his century: it is still too early to dare to give him his final place in the history of the world, but it is clear as day that this place will be a foremost one. In the domain of material fact it is fairly easy to estimate a man or a woman's influence: of a king we can say that he conquered so many thousand square miles of territory; we can in part express his work by colouring a map: of a soldier we can say that he won such and such battles. But in the subtler realms of thought it is harder to come to certain conclusions. In the case of William Morris we shall be able to point to many concrete facts, in works of art and books, which in

themselves would give their creator a place in the history of his time. But there is, beyond all this, an all-pervading spiritual light around this man's work, which prevents its due significance being hastily judged. His powers were so manifold that it is hard to see what is their collective effect upon the world of human thought.

If one seeks in the catalogues of the great public libraries one finds that the compilers have to choose a word to distinguish this William Morris from others of an exactly similar name. Thus, one is put down as "William Morris, Baptist Minister," another as "Teacher of Arithmetic," another as "Teetotaler," and so on. Then, when a distinctive epithet has to be found for the subject of this study, we usually find the word "Poet" added after his name. As a matter of fact, there are a dozen other words which would have met the case equally well. To choose an epithet to describe this man, it would be almost better to put one's hand into a bag full of descriptions of workers and use the first ticket that came out.

For instance, the word "poet" is a misleading description of a man who made a fortune by conducting a decorator's business in the West End of London. We are confirmed in this distrust of the description by reading that near the end of his life Morris told Burne-Jones that "poetry is tommy-rot." But on the other hand, he could never find sufficiently contemptuous terms to express how he despised the man of trade and commerce. It is a difficult problem to classify a man

who eludes analysis in this way. He wrote poetry, and still better prose. He painted pictures and dyed cloths; he illuminated manuscripts and printed books; he frightened people by the fierceness of his temper and lulled their minds by the honeyed-sweetness of his words; he was the dreamer of dreamers and the man who scared his fellow-students at Oxford by the rush of his attack with single-sticks; he lived in a world of Norse heroes and heroines, and yet plunged like a fanatic into the whirl of modern politics. To define William Morris is somewhat like holding a live eel.

Let that, for the moment, suffice to show the general scope of the man we have set ourselves to discuss in this little book. It will be more useful to look at the whole man after we have learned some of the main facts as they will appear in his story.

The family history, neither on the father's nor the mother's side, gives any clue to the character of William Morris the younger. His father was of middle-class stock, coming from the Welsh borders. The Sheltons were of Worcestershire, the earliest of them on record being a Birmingham mercer in the Tudor days; and they continued the family tree, as landlords and professional men and successful merchants, from that time onwards.

By the time young William arrived on the scene, his father was well on the way to an ample fortune, acquired by his business as a discount broker in Lombard Street. He could thus afford the luxury of a house in the country, besides his office in the City;

at that time not so common a condition for the City man as it is to-day. So it happened that his son was born on the edge of Epping Forest, then away beyond the dismal streets which stretch so far to-day. By the time William was six years old his family had moved to a still bigger house, Woodford Hall, the grounds of which touched the Forest itself.

It was in Epping Forest that William Morris learned to know and to love, with intimate affection, the intricacies and beauties of Nature. He began life as a sickly child, the luxury of continual fresh air and all the possibilities of a wealthy home made him robust. The home atmosphere was healthy and Morris had a delightful boyhood, free to roam in the woods and fields, the birds and the flowers his cherished companions. At the age of eight his father took him on a holiday to the churches of Kent, and it was there, in Canterbury Cathedral, that his mind was first gripped by the beauty of architectural design. It is worth thus noting that the love of Nature and the love of Art were firmly rooted at this early age; the rest of William Morris's life was little more than the widening of these two affections in multitudinous ways.

In 1847 the elder Morris died, leaving his family a recently granted coat-of-arms from the Heralds' College, which delighted his son, and a large fortune from a copper mine in Devonshire. Then, one year after his father's death, William went to Marlborough College, one of the newly founded public schools, of

which several started their careers about that time. There was no large town near—the nearest railway station was then eleven miles distant—and when work and sports were done, the wild country was the only resource for the boys, and they were left much to their own sweet will in roaming over it. Morris cared nothing for the orthodox games of a public school: he spent his out-of-school time in long walks through Savernake Forest and on the Downs: and increased his love of architecture and archæology. His love for ecclesiastical buildings was fanned by the religious atmosphere of the school, it was of a High Church character; and his biographer, Mr. Mackail, says emphatically that "Morris left school a pronounced Anglo-Catholic." He also records two other aspects of the man that was to be; for Mr. Mackail tells us that Morris charmed his companions, during their walks, and in their dormitory at night, by an endless flow of tales of "knights and fairies." The other characteristic was "the restlessness of his fingers, which must always be handling something . . . he used to seek relief from it in endless netting." There, again, we find traits which remained with Morris to his death: traits which made him famous; endless handwork and endless tales; they made him the greatest craftsman of his age, and one of its most imaginative poets.

Morris probably learned little at Marlborough—so far as school learning went. When he left, Mr. Mackail says he "was more of an expert in silkworms' eggs and old churches than in exact scholarship."

Indeed the whole school got out of hand, and there was something in the nature of an internal revolution in 1851. Anyhow, Morris left, and read for his entrance examination at Oxford with a private tutor.

In January 1853 he began his career at Exeter College. At his entrance examination the boy next to him was Edward Burne-Jones, the friend of his whole life. This friend has since written of the days of their first friendship: "... how different he was from all the men I had ever met. He talked with vehemence and sometimes with violence. I never knew him languid or tired." The same friend also tells how Morris came in on the first evening of a new term and "talked incessantly for seven hours or longer." The chief tie between these young men was something which they thought was love and respect for the Church and religion—but which their subsequent career proved to be a respect for the beauty of a traditional past when measured against the boisterous rush of an age of commercial money-making. The Church soon gave way to Literature and Art: and there was never any very sudden break, as some may imagine. The Morris who was on the verge (as he was at this time) of devoting his wealth to founding the house of a religious order of monks, was not really a different person from the man who eventually spent his money in preaching Socialism.

Canon Dixon, another friend at College, has described the Morris of that time as "an aristocrat and a High Churchman. His manners and tastes and sym-

pathies were all aristocratic." Here again there is little break with his later life. Morris did not cease to have aristocratic tastes when he became a Socialist; he merely desired that every one of his fellow-citizens should have the opportunity to indulge in aristocratic tastes also. His was an aristocracy of soul, not of lands and money.

In these Exeter College days Morris began the creation of formal literature. The earliest work has been mainly preserved in the pages of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which was published monthly during the year 1856 at Morris's expense. It is most interesting to go through poems and prose works and find in them almost every essential characteristic of the most mature Morris of later days. For example, in his "Story of the Unknown Church" we read of the Monkish Mason, his hero: "'the figure I had to carve was Abraham, sitting with a blossoming tree on each side of him, holding in his two hands the corners of his great robe, so that it made a mighty fold.'" Again, "And in process of time I raised a marble canopy that reached quite up to the top of the arch, and I painted it too as far as I could, and carved it all about with many flowers and histories." That remained to the last days Morris's ideal of life and work—to carve (whether in stone or tapestry or on parchment or in words) with many flowers and histories.

Again, in sheer skill and power of craftsmanship there are things in the first work which he never

surpassed. Listen to this, afterwards reprinted as "Summer Dawn" in the volume entitled "The Defence of Guenevere."

> "Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,
> Think but one thought of me, up in the stars
> The summer night waneth, the morning light slips
> Faint and grey twixt the leaves of the aspens."

He never wrote anything more beautiful and stately than those lines.

Once more, he is already overwhelmed with the love of colour; in the garden of his dreams the birds are: "Oh such birds! gold and ruby and emerald." Then: "we caught glimpses of the great golden corn sea, waving, waving, waving, for leagues and leagues; and among the corn grew burning scarlet poppies and blue corn flowers." And his love of the quietness of the fall of the year is also there: he writes of "A glorious autumn day, a day soft with melting golden haze: a vine and a rose grew together." That love of voluptuous beauty is thus revealed in his earliest work; and there is already his fascination for the wildly savage battle in his poem "Winter Weather."

> "There he lay dying,
> He had for his lying
> A spear in his traitorous mouth;
> A false tale made he
> Of my true, true lady,
> But the spear went through his mouth."

In 1854, when he was twenty-one, Morris went for a holiday to Northern France; which he repeated the

following year, this latter time accompanied by Burne-Jones and another college friend, Fulton. It was then that they both decided not to enter the Church; and in 1856 Morris was articled to G. E. Street, the famous architect, at first working at the Oxford Offices and, a few months after, moving up to London, when Street made his headquarters there. He was now definitely launched on his life work: the doubts and hesitancy of youth had given way to a final decision—for good or ill. Morris used some very typical words when he announced his plans: "I do not hope to be great at all in anything, but perhaps I may reasonably hope to be happy in my work, and sometimes when I am idle and doing nothing, pleasant visions go past me of the things that may be."

In closing this first chapter of his life's story, once more it may be insisted that all the elements of the famous man are already to be discovered in the raw youth—if indeed the soul of William Morris was ever raw. He was already a concentrated mass of energy, in mind and body. He was stamped in his set as an intellectual treasure; and his fencing-master has recorded that Morris's bill for broken sticks and foils equalled those of all the rest of his pupils put together—such was the fury of his attack. It is a typical record.

CHAPTER II

THE CRAFTSMAN

It is impossible to divide up the life of any man into watertight compartments: still, it is not far from the rough truth to regard the period of Morris's life between 1856 and 1865 (between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-one) as mainly marked by the practice of the crafts of the hand. As we have seen, he had become the pupil of Street, the architect, and from this basis the smaller allied crafts soon sprouted. "In his spare time, besides the poems and stories which he went on pouring forth, Morris was beginning to practise more than one handicraft—clay modelling, carving in wood and stone and illuminating," writes Mr. Mackail, of the year 1856.

Indeed, the profession of architecture, pure and simple, was soon put on one side. After the removal to London, Morris and Burne-Jones came under the strong influence of Rossetti, who drew them away to his own loved art of painting. At first he tried the double life of being Street's pupil during the day and working at a figure school during the evening; but soon, to his dear mother's horror, he had changed his mind once more and resigned his office work.

The situation is best summed up in a letter written

by Burne-Jones at this time. "Topsy [Morris's nickname among his intimates, which stuck to him from College to his death] and I live together in the quaintest room in all London [they were still in No. 1 Upper Gordon Street, Bloomsbury] hung with brasses of old knights and drawings of Albert Dürer. We know Rossetti now as a daily friend, and we know Browning too, who is the greatest poet alive, and we know Arthur Hughes, and Woolner, and Madox Brown—Madox Brown is a lark! . . . Topsy will be a painter, he works hard, is prepared to wait twenty years, loves art more and more every day. He has written several poems, exceedingly dramatic—the Brownings, I hear, have spoken very highly of one that was read to them; Rossetti thinks one called 'Rapunzel' is equal to Tennyson: he is now illuminating 'Guendolen' for Georgie . . . The Mag. is going to smash—let it go! The world is not converted and never will be. It has had stupid things in it lately. I shall not write again for it, nor more will Topsy,—we cannot do more than one thing at a time, and our hours are too valuable to spend so." And, on the other side, we find Rossetti writing: "Two young men, projectors of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, have recently come to town from Oxford and are now very intimate friends of mine. Their names are Morris and Jones . . . both are men of real genius. Jones's designs are models of finish and imaginative detail, unequalled by anything, unless, perhaps, Albert Dürer's finest works; and Morris, though without practice as yet, has no less power, I

fancy. He has written some wonderful poetry too." Another friend was Ruskin, of whom Burne-Jones writes in 1856: "Just come back from being with our hero for four hours—so happy we've been: he is so kind to us, calls us his dear boys. . . . To-night he comes down to our rooms, to-morrow night he comes again and every Thursday night the same—isn't that like a dream?" The other close friend whom Morris gained now was Philip Webb, at this time also in Street's office. With such men of genius around him, Morris was fairly launched on his career.

There was one side of his nature which was only long afterwards to come to the surface. Just before leaving Oxford he had written: "Love and work, these two things only. . . . I can't enter into politico-social subjects with any interest, for on the whole I see that things are in a muddle, and I have no power or vocation to get them right in ever so little a degree. My work is the embodiment of dreams in one form or another."

It was in 1857, when Morris and Burne-Jones moved into rooms at No. 17 Red Lion Square, that Morris was driven by sheer force of circumstances to practical craftsmanship. They wanted to furnish their dwelling; and there was nothing to be bought which was fit for a decent taste. So Morris and Webb set to the designing and production of household goods, and here we have the first effort of the future famous firm of decorators.

Rossetti and Burne-Jones supplied the more purely

MORRIS'S HOUSE, IN RED LION SQUARE

decorative side of this early furniture, in the form of paintings on the panels.

It was in 1857, while on a visit to Oxford, where he was helping to decorate the walls of the Union Society, that Morris met his future wife, Miss Jane Burden. So it is not surprising that he spent most of his time in Oxford until his marriage in 1859.

In 1858 he had published his first volume, the book of poems collected under the title of "The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems." It has probably been more read than any of his poems; but at the time of its appearance, was almost ignored by the general public; and even the praise of Robert Browning could not encourage Morris to write any more poetry for a long time—until he began "The Earthly Paradise" in 1866. "The Defence of Guenevere" volume is packed with gems of drama, of melody, and sheer beauty. It probably holds more real poetry than any of Morris's other work in verse, unless, perhaps, "Love is Enough." The very genius of the man is shown in the mere range from the stately tale of "The Defence" and the "King Arthur's Tomb" to the graceful ballad form of "The Eve of Crecy" beginning:

> "Gold on her head and gold on her feet
> And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
> And a golden girdle round my sweet;—
> Ah qu'elle est belle La Marguerite."

His philosophy of life comes out in such lines as:

> "Skies, earth, men's looks and deeds, all that has past,
> Not being ourselves, in that half sleep, half strife,
> (Strange sleep, strange strife) that men call living. . . ."

In short, his first volume contained almost all, the rest of his life was to be but the amplification of the first themes.

But there was another reason, beyond the smart of neglect, which took Morris's mind from poetry for the next eight years. With his marriage came the natural consequence of building a home; and in the building of this home was displayed all its master's desire to have the everyday things of life beautiful to see and useful for their purpose. It was in 1859 (he had married in the April of that year) that he began to build the Red House at Upton in Kent. The design came from the mind of Philip Webb, who also planned a large part of the furniture within. The house became a natural focus for all the craftsmanship and faculty of design which were so abundant in the little brotherhood that surrounded Morris. It was the failure to find any factory or shop which could supply Morris with what he desired that led to the formal foundation of the firm of "Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals," as they styled themselves in full.

This great event in the history of modern art happened in April 1861. Besides the names which appeared in the title of the firm, the other partners were Rossetti, Madox Brown, Burne-Jones and Philip Webb. The first workshop and showroom was No. 8 Red Lion Square. Morris and Faulkner were the active managers; the rest, from the almost nominal partner Rossetti to the active Webb, did varying work.

A description by Faulkner of the normal board meeting of the firm is valuable: "Beginning at 8 or 9 P.M. they open with the relation of anecdotes which have been culled by members of the firm since the last meeting—this store being exhausted, Topsy and Brown will perhaps discuss the relative merits of the art of the thirteenth and fifteenth century, and then perhaps after a few more anecdotes, business matters will come up for discussion about 10 or 11 o'clock and be furiously discussed till 12, 1 or 2."

What a delightful set they were—full of the joy of life, treating it with the scant respect of schoolboys still. Lady Burne-Jones has described a visit to the Red House about this time. "Charles Faulkner came down a couple of days after we did, and helped to paint patterns on walls and ceilings, and played bowls in the alley, and in the intervals between work joined in triangular bear-fights in the drawing-room. Once in the middle of a scrimmage, that had surged up the steps into the 'Minstrel's Gallery,' he suddenly leapt clear over the parapet into the middle of the floor with an astounding noise; another time he stored windfall apples in the gallery and defended himself against all comers until a well-delivered apple gave Morris a black eye." Such were the men who revolutionised the handicrafts of Europe—they played hide and seek all over the house after it was dark. Another favourite game at meal times was to send Morris "to Coventry" for some trivial reason, and only talk to him by means of messages to be delivered through his wife. But in

spite of all this play, the work of decoration proceeded, until in February 1862 Burne-Jones could write: "Top . . . is slowly making Red House the beautifullest place on earth."

This was, in the usual acceptance of the term, the most peaceful time of Morris's life. His home life was restful; and for a time it almost looked as if he would settle down into a staid, respectable citizen. He actually joined the Volunteers! Even more; for Lady Burne-Jones records that "he attended drill regularly." But this peace did not last for long. For one thing, the family copper mine in Devonshire was getting worked out; and the Morris unearned income was going down rapidly year by year. The decorating business was not yet paying its own way; though it was increasing its turnover each year. Then Morris had an attack of rheumatic fever, and the journey to London every day became impossible.

So it came about that the Red House must be given up: for Morris neither could afford nor did he desire to give up the work on which his joy in life depended: business was pleasure in his case. The Morrises in 1865 moved, therefore, to a house in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, to which also was moved the workshop which had so far been in Red Lion Square. Thus Morris, intentionally or not, came, like the mediæval craftsman whom he so much admired, to live and work in the same dwelling. It was a fitting accomplishment of his ideal of making one's work the happiest part of life: he did not understand the sense of working during the

THE RED HOUSE, UPTON

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. Arthur Mee)

day and going home to play. He had a conviction—which so many people think absurd—that it is possible to have work which shall give to the worker the delights of play-time. Morris found his pleasure in work, not in idleness. That was really the root of his philosophy; of which we shall discover the fruits as we proceed with his history.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN OF LETTERS: 1865–1876

ONCE again, the sheer breadth of William Morris's character compels us to put a somewhat arbitrary title at the head of this chapter. During the years of which it will treat, Morris was engaged in much else besides literature. The title has been chosen merely because it seems to express the dominant note.

The sudden break in his life involved in the moving from "Red House" in Kent, to Bloomsbury once more, may have had an unconscious effect in setting Morris's pilgrim mind on a new road. Perhaps the disappointment at the indifferent reception of the "Defence of Guenevere" had passed away. Whatever the reason, in the year 1866 he turned once again to poetry, and began the "Earthly Paradise," which appeared in successive volumes during the years 1867–70.

In some ways this is Morris's most characteristic life work—which is by no means to say that it is also his finest work. It is characteristic because he here expressed himself in a series of tales of wanderings in a world of fantasy. The setting is of a body of men, driven from Europe by the Black Death pestilence of the sixteenth century, who go out to seek a better land —an Earthly Paradise—which was fabled to lie beyond

the Western ocean. They spent their years seeking it, but found it not at all. So in old age they came to a colony of the descendants of Greek adventurers. There they took up their abode, and the twenty-four tales of the Earthly Paradise are the stories they told to one another—twelve by the Greeks, and twelve by the mixed races of the Wanderers. These tales are, in fact, Morris's choice of the mythology of the world so far as he knew it—written with his own endless power to weave and reweave them into a new telling.

They are the reaction of Morris's heart against the everyday world which his sensitive spirit so often found ugly and depressing—they are his travels in the land which he knew far better than any other—the land of Dreams. In a series which is entitled "Pilgrim Books" it must be continually kept in mind that Dreamland was the most real place of Morris's pilgrimages: Kent and Bloomsbury and Kelmscott were but accidental resting places. The often-quoted but endlessly beautiful verses at the beginning of the "Earthly Paradise" are a clear statement of the impulse which compelled him to write these tales—this necessity to escape from reality. There is a great pathos in these opening words:

> "Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
> I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
> Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
> Or bring again the pleasure of past years."

Then he tells how he has grown hopeless of ever

reforming the evils around him; so, almost with the gospel of despair, he says:

> "Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
> Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
> Beat with light wing against the ivory gate,
> Telling a tale not too importunate
> To those who in that sleepy region stay,
> Lulled by the singer of an empty day."

Then he plunges into the body of his story, with the first words a command to his readers:

> "Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
> Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
> Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
> Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
> The dream of London, small and white and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green."

The "Earthly Paradise" is, indeed, William Morris's escape from the land he was fated to live in to the land which he would have chosen had he been a free agent.

The first of the tales to see the public light was—to write as an Irishwoman—not one of the tales at all. For the "Life and Death of Jason" grew so long that he was compelled to publish it independently; and so it happened that it was the first to appear: this was in 1867. It was its author's first public success in literature. Of his "Defence of Guenevere," published nine years before, the first edition had not yet been sold. Of this second book, a fresh edition was needed at once, and the sale has been continuous ever since.

There is a placid serenity about this tale of Jason

MORRIS'S HOUSE, 26 QUEEN'S SQUARE

and his search after the Golden Fleece. Even in the most dramatic moments—when the flames of Medea's vengeance rush up around Glauce, Jason's new love—one feels somehow that it is the decorative orderliness of an illuminated manuscript, rather than the devouring and scorching heat of real fire. And so it is, more or less, with all the tales of the "Earthly Paradise": gentle, unaffected melodiousness; the simple telling of a series of events. They are not great verse, they are great stories, told perfectly by a man who loved the labour of telling them.

The publication of these volumes of the "Earthly Paradise" was leading Morris's fertile mind into another craft. Just as he wanted his story to be beautifully worded, so also he wished it to be beautifully printed. Beauty with Morris was a universal need. He asked Burne-Jones to join in a scheme according to which the latter was to prepare five hundred designs for woodcuts. In fact, more than one hundred of these were designed; and Morris and the firm cut many of the wood-blocks. But they were not a success; and it was not without much more thought and experience that Morris, at the end of his life, succeeded in producing a book which was the work of the mature craftsman in printing and illustrating.

But if the difficulties of printing yet exceeded his technical knowledge, there was an allied branch of the craft wherein Morris was already sufficiently equipped. It was about this time that he began to be intimate with F. S. Ellis, who was an expert in manuscripts and old books, and now became the publisher of the third and

subsequent editions of "Jason" and of the "Earthly Paradise." With this new friendship in his life it is not surprising to learn that about 1870 Morris began to make the illumination of manuscripts one of his chief passions—there is really no other word but "passion" to express the ardour of his love for craftsmanship.

But another love was sharing his volatile mind. He had been learning Icelandic; and in the year 1870, which saw, also, the publication of the last volume of the "Earthly Paradise," he put forth with Mr. Magnusson a translation of the "Volsunga Saga." The weirdness of this new world had gripped his imagination; and in 1871 he set off on a journey over Iceland with Faulkner, Mr. Magnusson and Mr. W. H. Evans. It was undoubtedly one of the events of his life, and had the strongest influence on his future works. Morris kept a diary during the trip, so we know in detail what happened and what he thought as he went along. The grimness of the scenery pleased him. He writes of the Faroes, on the way: "the coasts were most wonderful on either side; pierced rocks running out from the cliffs under which a tug might have sailed: caves that the water ran up into, how far we could not tell. . . . I have seen nothing out of a dream so strange as our coming out of the last narrow sound into the Atlantic, and leaving the high wall of rocks astern in the shadowless midnight twilight: nothing I have ever seen has impressed me so much." Then they came where "Oddi lies on a marked knoll or slope, above a great stretch of boggy land through which Eastern

Rangriver winds; the hills under Three-corner, and the long stretch of Fleetlithe gradually leading into the terrible gorges of the ice-mountains, girdle in these grey-green flats: it is a noteworthy place historically, for in fact the men who died here or hereabout still live in people's minds as the writers of the great stories and both the Eddas."

Later he writes: "I spent my time alone in trying to regain my spirits, which had suddenly fallen very low almost ever since we came into Laxdale. Just think though, what a mournful place this is—Iceland I mean—setting aside the pleasure of one's animal life there, the fresh air, the riding and rough life, and feeling of adventure; how every place and name marks the death of its short-lived eagerness and glory: and withal so little is the life changed in some ways: Olaf Peacock went about summer and winter after his live stock, and saw to his hay-making and fishing, just as this little peak-nosed parson does. . . . But Lord! what littleness and helplessness has taken the place of the old passion and violence that had place here once—and all is unforgotten." Still later: "I have seen many marvels and some terrible pieces of country: slept in the home-field of Njal's house, and Gunnar's, and at Herdholt: I have seen Bjarg and Bathstead and the place where Bolli was killed, and am now a half hour's ride from where Gudrun died." So much of this was woven into his later romances.

Just before leaving England, he had entered into occupation of a new home in the country—Kelmscott

Manor House, an early Stuart dwelling on the Thames, near Lechdale, and thirty miles from Oxford. It is the home with which Morris is most closely associated by the world at large. He described it himself after the first sight: "A heaven on earth, an old stone Elizabethan house like Water Eaton, and such a garden! close down on the river, a boat house and all things handy." When he had to describe it again, in a magazine article written during his last year of life, he wrote thus: "A house that I love; with a reasonable love I think: for though my words may give you no idea of any special charm about it, yet I assure you that the charm is there; so much has the old house grown up out of the soil and the lives of those that lived on it, some thin thread of tradition, a half anxious sense of the delight of meadow and acre and wood and river; a certain amount (not too much let us hope) of common sense, a liking for making materials serve one's turn, and perhaps at bottom some grain of sentiment:—this I think was what went to the making of the old house."

Until 1874 Morris shared this house with Rossetti; and Mr. Ellis took his place as joint-tenant for several years. It was, says Mr. Mackail, "the haven of rest to which he always returned with a fresh and deep delight. All seasons there were alike sweet to him." It is strange how he divided this love with the hard-working life of London. He writes in one letter: "I rather want to be in London again, for I feel as if my time were passing with too little done in the country; altogether, I fear I am a London bird; its soot has been rubbed into

KELMSCOTT MANOR—DISTANT VIEW

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. F. H. Evans)

me, and even these autumn mornings can't wash me clean of restlessness."

The next few years witnessed a burst of activity in literature and manuscript writing and illuminating. Mr. Mackail holds that the Omar Khayyám book [1] is one of the great masterpieces of his life. He lavished upon it all the intense love of beauty of detail which he impressed on all his work of every shape and form. This beauty was now expressing itself in his greatest longer poem, "Love is Enough," which was published in 1872. The dominant note is the all-supremacy of Love over every human desire: the King Pharamond gives up his throne, that he may content himself with the damsel Azalais. It is a riotous ecstasy of Love: and its lines have a honeyed melody which Morris never again equalled, perhaps:

"Love is Enough: while ye deemed him a-sleeping,
There were signs of his coming and sounds of his feet,
His touch it was that would bring you to weeping,
When the summer was sweetest and music most sweet."

Says Azalais to the sleeping Pharamond:

"Think now if this May sky should darken above us,
And the death of the world in this minute should part us,
Think, my love, of the loss if my lips had not kissed thee."

The quick change from the loves of the peasants, Giles and Joan (who came into the town to see the mystery play performed before the other lovers, the Emperor and Empress), to the play lovers on the stage, is most skilful and dramatic. As a piece of literary craft it is beyond anything Morris did in poetry.

[1] Given by Morris to Lady Burne-Jones.

It is typical of Morris that at the same time he was writing this classic of other world poesy he was attempting to write a modern novel. It was his only attempt in that direction, and it only compassed about one-third of the journey to completion, and it was a failure which he soon gave up any idea of remedying. He seems to have discovered one art, at last, of which he could not be a master. So he turned to his illuminated manuscripts once more.

Then at the end of 1872 the Morris family left Queen's Square and went to live in Turnham Green, on the west side of London: here they stayed for the following six years. The family rooms at Queen's Square went for the use of the growing business of Morris & Company; Morris kept two rooms for his study and a bedroom when he was too busy or disinclined to go home.

In the spring of 1873 he went to Italy for the first time. It is unexpected news to hear that the visit was not a success; he found nothing there to equal his favourite treasures of Northern France. But indeed he went out rather as a travelling companion to the sick Burne-Jones than with any desires of his own. For he was saving himself for another visit to Iceland later on in the year. Also he had bad luck in Italy, for as Burne-Jones wrote: "Morris has only a week here and every day it has rained and been as cold as England: much to his joy though, because for all his life he can speak of the bleak days he spent in Italy."

But the Iceland visit Morris treated almost as the

visiting of a shrine. When it was over he wrote: "The journey has deepened the impression I had of Iceland and increased my love for it. The glorious simplicity of the terrible and tragic, but beautiful land. As I looked up at Charley's Wain to-night all my travel then seemed to come back on me, made solemn and elevated, in one moment, till my heart swelled with the wonder of it: surely I have gained a great deal, and it was no idle whim that drew me there but a true instinct for what I needed." One more immediate result of this visit was the translation of "Three Northern Love Stories" from the Icelandic; and the composition of the long poem of "Sigurd the Volsung, and the Fall of the Niblungs" was commencing to take shape in his mind. About the same time he began his translation of Virgil's "Æneid."

Then another craft gripped him, the art of dyeing: for he found that it was a hopeless task to weave with materials which were of poor colours. So there was nothing to be done but go down to the Staffordshire dye works and work there until he had mastered the technicalities of the new trade.

It was at this time that the affairs of the now prosperous Morris & Company had to be put on a more reasonable basis. In the eyes of the law the partners were equals: in the eyes of commonsense Morris was the owner of almost the whole business. Rossetti and Madox Brown and Marshall stood by their legal rights; and when the partnership was dissolved in 1875—leaving the business in Morris's hands

alone — the conduct of these three necessarily resulted in the severance of their friendship with the man whose good-nature had not guarded himself against such developments.

In November 1876 "Sigurd the Volsung" was published, but it was not well received. Somehow it was not a successful work. The lines do not seem sufficiently stately to carry such a vast and tragical theme. Perhaps it was that the theme was too tragical for Morris's pleasure-loving and affectionate mind. There was too much of the great revenge which overshadowed the great loves.

KELMSCOTT MANOR, FROM THE FRONT GARDEN

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. F. H. Evans)

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICAL PERIOD (1877–1886)

ANOTHER turn in the life-wheel of William Morris was now about to be made. He had become the father of a family, a well-to-do citizen of the mature age of forty-three; but so far he had shirked the trials and responsibilities of a civic conscience and an active political creed. We have seen how he decided at Oxford that the subject of social reform was not his job: he saw no way out of the tangle. But if he would not consider the troubles of Society, he soon began to find that Society was up against him in numberless affairs, which he could not afford to let pass without a protest. If he was prepared to leave Society as it was, Society was not prepared to leave him alone. He could not live his own life unmolested, so it happened that he was forced by circumstances to start crusading against things which were hampering the pleasure of his existence.

His first public crusade was obviously very closely attached to his artistic career. Beautiful buildings were a necessary part of his life; and he found that the relics of the past were being destroyed by senseless idiots who were sometimes foolish enough to imagine that they were preserving the old by restoration. So

Morris was the active spirit in founding the "Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings" in the year 1877.

His letter in the *Athenæum* expressed his desire: "My eye just now caught the word 'restoration' in the morning paper, and on looking closer I saw that it is nothing less than the Minster of Tewkesbury that is to be destroyed by Sir Gilbert Scott. . . . What I wish for, therefore, is that an Association should be set on foot to . . . protest against all 'restoration' that means more than keeping out wind and weather and to . . . awaken a feeling that our ancient buildings are not mere ecclesiastical toys, but sacred monuments of the nation's growth and hope."

Some people would not call the "Anti Scrape" Society (that was Morris's own nick-name for it) political life. As a matter of fact it was. But in any case, there was no doubt about Morris's next adventure into public life. He was an active member of the "Eastern Question Association," founded in 1876 to influence the action of England in the affairs of Turkey and its surrounding states. The terrible massacres of the Bulgarians by the Turks had been taking place; and there was the possibility that England would not, for political reasons, stand by the Russians when the latter demanded that the slaughter should cease. Hence this association to force the hands of the British Government to be on the side of humanity rather than play the game of conventional diplomacy, which was historically against the Russians. Morris

was elected treasurer of the association and took his duties very seriously.

His literary handling of the subject, in a letter to Faulkner, was more rational and vivid than orthodox—he is discussing the possibility of our attacking Turkey: "what should we do with Turkey if we didn't wish to be damned? 'Take it ourselves,' says the bold man, 'and rule it as we rule India.' But the bold man don't live in England at present I think; and I know what the Tory trading stock-jobbing scoundrel that one calls an Englishman to-day would do with it: he would shut his eyes hard over it, get his widows and orphans to lend it money, and sell it vast quantities of bad cotton."

In May 1877 Morris published a manifesto "to the working men of England," when we seemed on the point of war with Russia. He asked: "who are they that are leading you on into war? Greedy gamblers on the Stock Exchange, idle officers of the Army and Navy, poor fellows, worn-out mockers of the Clubs, desperate purveyors of exciting war news for the comfortable breakfast tables of those who have nothing to lose by war; and lastly, in the place of honour, the Tory rump, that we fools, weary of peace, reason and justice, chose at the last election to represent us . . . Working-men of England, one word of warning yet: I doubt if you know the bitterness of hatred against freedom and progress that lies at the hearts of a certain part of the richer classes in this country; their newspapers veil it in a kind of decent language; but you do

but hear them talking among themselves, as I have often, and I know not whether scorn or anger would prevail in you at their folly and insolence. These men cannot speak of your order, of its aims, of its leaders, without a sneer or an insult: these men if they had the power (may England perish rather) would thwart your just inspiration, would silence you, would deliver you bound hand and foot for ever to irresponsible capital."

Political enthusiasm could not show itself more clearly than in this appeal; and from this moment William Morris, lover of the arts and crafts of the Middle Ages and the stories of their knights and ladies, became the keenest champion of the down-trodden democracy of England.

He was not yet a Socialist, for two reasons: first, he still vainly imagined that the worn-out Liberal Party was in earnest when it prattled of Reform; secondly, he had not yet consciously grasped the economic facts which lay at the basis of the Socialist creed. So for a little while we find him calling himself a Liberal Democrat or some such name. But he was soon to be disillusioned.

On January 5, 1878, he writes: "More and more I feel how entirely right the flattest democracy is." This same month he wrote his first political song, "Wake, London Lads," and in December he gave his first public lecture. It was not on politics, but on the crafts; nevertheless, it was soon to pass—by an easy transition in Morris's mind—into his political speaking.

But the orthodox politicians were rapidly taking

A CORNER OF THE TAPESTRY ROOM IN KELMSCOTT MANOR

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. F. H. Evans)

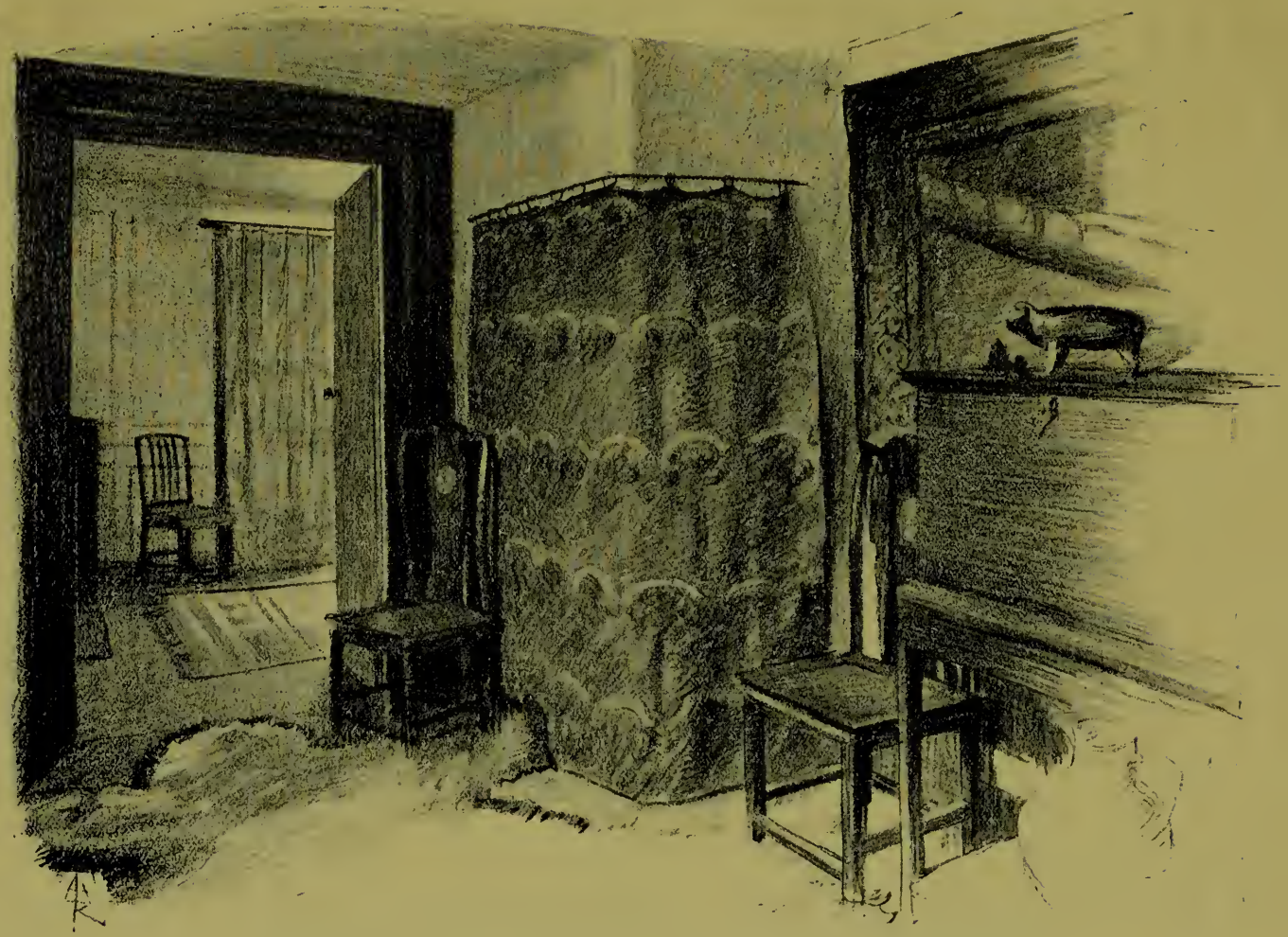
their proper place in the straightforward, frank mind of William Morris. He is soon writing to Faulkner: "I am full of shame and anger at the cowardice of the so-called Liberal Party. On Monday our Parliamentaries began to quake, and they have quaked the meeting out now. The E. Q. A. was foremost in the flight, and really I must say they behaved ill in the matter. Gladstone was quite ready to come up to the scratch and has behaved well throughout; but I am so ashamed that I can scarcely look people in the face, though I do my best to keep the thing up. The working men are in a great rage about it, as well they may be. . . . I am out of it now; I mean as to bothering my head about it: I shall give up reading the papers and shall stick to my work." So, for the moment, political affairs were tossed almost contemptuously aside. Morris went back to an exciting life of craftsmanship—at the moment his master passion was dyeing and weaving.

However, the political work had been a greater strain than he knew, and there was a serious attack of rheumatic gout in the spring of April 1878. So when he joined his family in Italy at the end of that month, he was almost a cripple. In the streets of Genoa he fainted, and had to be carried on the back of a passing stranger. But he improved in health, though he never quite enjoyed Italy, and compares it in his letters with the early trips he made to Northern France—to the disadvantage of Italy. "Many times I think of the first time I ever went abroad, over to Rouen, and what a wonder of glory that was to me when I first came

upon the Cathedral rising above the flower market. It scarcely happens to me like that now, at least not with man's work, though whiles it does with bits of the great world, like the Garda Lake the other day, or unexpected sudden sights of the mountains. Even the inside of St. Mark's gave me rather deep satisfaction, and rest for the eyes, than that strange exaltation of spirits, which I remember of old in France, and which the mountains give me yet. I don't think this is wholly because I am grown older, but because I really have had more sympathy with the North from the first in spite of all the faults of its work. Let me confess and be hanged—with the later work of Southern Europe I am quite out of sympathy."

By the time he returned to London, he was almost ready to take possession of a new town house—Kelmscott House, Upper Mall, Hammersmith—which was his London home until his death. In October of 1878, the family had moved in: it was a Georgian house, and became an admirable setting for the fruits of its master's own handicrafts.

But his resolve not to read the papers and to put political affairs out of his mind could not last for long; and by 1879 we find him treasurer of the National Liberal League, a rather indefinite kind of Society, which was the first flutter of the working class of London in its attempt to force the hands of the more orthodox party men. What remaining glimmer of orthodox Liberalism there ever was in Morris, was finally extinguished when the Liberals brought in their



KELMSCOTT MANOR, SHOWING DOOR LEADING INTO ROSSETTI'S ROOM

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. F. H. Evans)

Irish Coercion Bill of 1881. Mr. Mackail records the change in terse words: "In the November following Morris took an actively joyful part in winding up the affairs of the National Liberal League. The social reforms which he had at heart he saw disappearing amid an ocean of Whiggery, which he no more loved than he did Toryism. . . . Very soon Morris's attitude towards current politics became one of mere irritation and contempt." Then Mr. Mackail goes on to quote some words from Borrow's "Romany Rye" as best expressing Morris's mind on this subject: "Toryism, a system of common robbery, is nevertheless far better than Whiggism—a compound of petty larceny, popular instruction, and receiving of stolen goods."

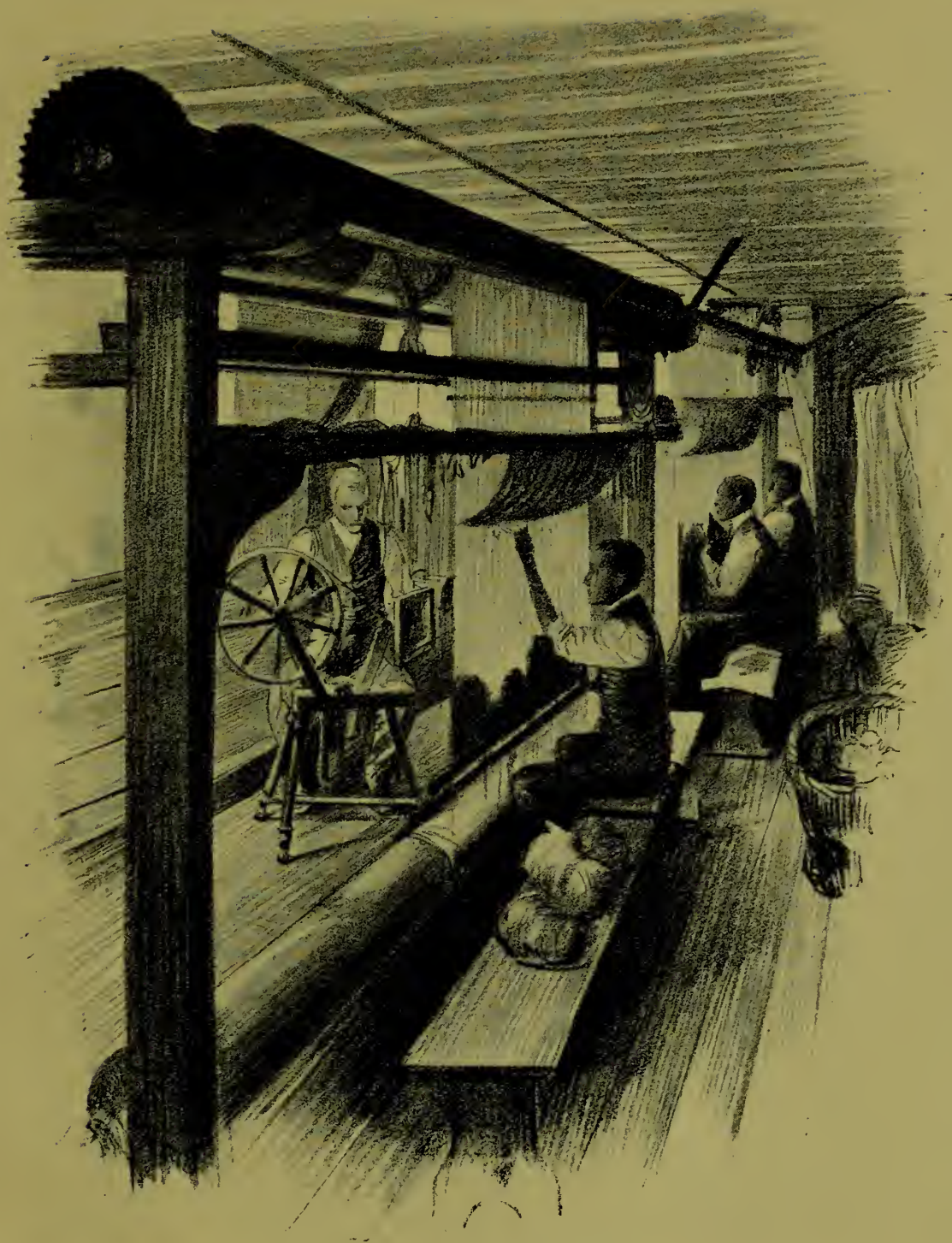
The attitude of passive waiting was not possible in a mind like Morris's, if he saw the slightest hope of anything at all being accomplished; and in 1881 he had hopes, in spite of all his contempt, for he wrote: "It is good to feel the air laden with the coming storm, even as we go about our daily work, or while away time in light matters."

But for the moment the urgent affairs of everyday life insisted on claiming his attention. The decorating business of Morris & Company had now outgrown even the whole occupation of the Queen Square house. The firm had already opened a shop in Oxford Street to which their customers could go. To tell the truth, it was not advisable for the good of the business that the customers should have too much to do with Morris personally. He was in the habit of saying too frankly

what he thought. When one day a distinguished customer came to choose carpets and, objecting to the brilliant, glorious colours which pleased the great craftsman's mind, actually ventured to say: "Are these all . . . I thought your colours were subdued," Morris replied: "If you want dirt, you can find that in the street," and into the street, it is not surprising to learn, the wealthy customer quickly went, his patronage of the firm at an end!

Some disused print works at Merton, in Surrey, where the river Wandle was most suitable for the process of the dyeing department, were taken over in 1881. The processes of tapestry and the printing of cotton goods—the Morris chintzes—were practically new departments added after the removal of the works to Merton; and the record of this year is a maze of craft labour in Morris's career: his energy was almost superhuman.

Then came a dramatic change in his life. In 1881 the Radical Clubs of London had combined into a "Democratic Federation." At first it was nothing much more than an advanced Liberal Association, but a very short time availed to change its outlook. When on the 13th of January 1883, the name of "William Morris, designer," was added to its list of members, he could say: "I am truly glad I have joined the only Society I could find that is definitely Socialistic." On the very same day, it is interesting to note, he was elected an Honorary Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. It is scarcely a paradox to add that on the day he was



THE ARRAS LOOMS, MERTON ABBEY

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. H. C. Marillier)

thus officially recognised by orthodox Society, he on his side took the definite step of cutting himself off from orthodoxy. A few months before this, he had sold his most valuable books, in order that he might use the money for Socialist propaganda. The next few years were one intense struggle, on his part, to show his fellow-citizens that Socialism was the only remedy for social disorder. Literature and his business were tossed on one side in the blaze of his enthusiasm. His friends looked on with wonder; Burne-Jones, the closest and oldest friend of all, has written that it "was the only time when I failed Morris. . . . When he went into it, I thought he would have subdued the ignorant, conceited, mistaken rancour of it all—that he would teach them some humility, and give them some sense of obedience, with a splendid bird's-eye view of all that has happened in the world, and his genius of History in the abstract. I had hopes he would affect them. But never a bit—he did them absolutely no good—they got complete possession of him. All the nice men that went into it were never listened to, only noisy, rancorous ones got the ear of the movement." At another time Burne-Jones wrote: "I shall never try again to leave the world that I can control to my heart's desire—the little world that has the walls of my work-room for its furthest horizon—and I want Morris back to it, and want him to write divine books and leave the rest."

This is the narrow verdict that Morris had to hear from some of his dearest friends. It only showed how

much greater and wider he was than any of them. Morris was a man who made up his own mind, and went his own way. And his way was straight to Socialism; he went that way with the irresistible rush that had carried him along the path of Art and Literature. No half-measure would satisfy him. Of the first meeting of the Democratic Federation that he attended he wrote: "Rowland was there and spoke highly to my liking; advocated street preaching of our doctrines as the real practical method." Into the streets therefore went William Morris, one of the foremost men in Europe, to preach a gospel of rebellion to the people he found there.

He did not mince his terms when he discussed the horrors of the Society he saw around him; and when some rebuked him for the vigour of his language, he turned on them with the retort: "I am tired of being mealy-mouthed." In June of 1883 he wrote: "I used to think that we might further real Socialistic progress by doing what one could on the lines of ordinary middle-class Radicalism: I have been driven of late into the conclusion that I was mistaken, that Radicalism is the wrong line, so to say, and will never develop into anything more than Radicalism: in fact that it is made for and by the middle classes and will always be under the control of rich capitalists; they will have no objection to its political development if they think they can stop it there: but as to real social changes, they will not allow them if they can help it. You may see almost any day such phrases as 'This is the way to stop the spread of Socialism' in the Liberal papers."

There was a sensitive shyness about Morris which made him shrink from public speaking, but that did not stop him from doing what he considered his duty. Lady Burne-Jones, in her most valuable Memories of her husband, records a letter they received from Morris: "It is a beautiful bright autumn morning here, as fresh as daisies: and I am not over inclined for my morning preachment at Walham Green, but go I must, as also to Victoria Park in the afternoon. I had a sort of dastardly hope that it might rain. Mind you, I don't pretend to say I don't like it in some way or other; like it when I am on my feet, if I flow."

He was soon worried by the want of cohesion among his comrades: as early as August of 1883 he was complaining of this. He wanted to stand firm against compromise, as he thought it was; he was not so hopeful of immediate victory that he thought worth while any relaxation of principles for the remote chance of gaining it.

Morris's political creed as a whole must be left for discussion in a later chapter: we must only sketch here the outward incidents of his political life. He spoke and lectured all over England and Scotland, and his more specific art lectures really were Socialist propaganda. When he was wanted by the Russell Club to lecture before an Oxford University audience, with the Master of University College in the room, he finished his lecture on Art and Democracy by announcing that he was the authorised speaker of a Socialist Society and he appealed for recruits. It had the

result of a bomb, and the reverend Master rose to explain that the situation was none of his making.

At the end of 1884 Morris and his supporters broke away from the Social Democratic Federation (leaving it under the leadership of Mr. Hyndman) and founded another group which they called the Socialist League. Morris held now the still more responsible position of being the recognised leader of his section; he had also to find most of the money to run the League and its propagandist paper, the *Commonwealth* which led off well with a first number which sold out one edition of 5000 and then printed a second. Society at large saw at last that Morris really meant business, and he came in for the usual abuse that is hurled at any one who is feared. As he spent most of his money in furthering Socialism, naturally the Radical and Tory tried to stop him by the taunt that he, as a Socialist, had no right to any surplus wealth at all; to which Morris very easily replied that it was his business to help the whole of the working classes to regain their rights, rather than think only of the men in his own business. When Morris next went to Oxford to lecture, the platform was stormed at the finish of the meeting (mainly of course by harmless and brainless undergraduates). Then Morris got himself arrested in a London Police Court on a charge of having assaulted a policeman. What really had happened was that Morris and his friends cried "shame" when the magistrate had imposed a sentence of two months hard labour on one of their comrades for speaking in

KELMSCOTT HOUSE, HAMMERSMITH, 1887

the streets. Morris was hauled before the Bench, and when asked who he was, blazed forth: "I am an artist and a literary man, pretty well known, I think, throughout Europe." This was an indiscretion Morris himself must have regretted; it came on the spur of an agitated moment. He was discharged.

Then hard work and the worry of squabbling friends made Morris ill; he had a severe attack of his old enemy, the gout, in October 1885, and for the time he was helpless. Then came the famous Trafalgar Square meeting of the unemployed of February 1886, when the people broke a few windows in the west end—just to show that they were not out for a holiday, but because they were really starving. We find Burne-Jones writing to Morris anxiously begging him not to involve himself in any disorder; to which Morris replied that he thought there was no chance of further rioting; and in the Editorial Notes of that week in the *Commonwealth* he wrote of these riots: "We have been overtaken unprepared, by a revolutionary incident, but that incident was practically aimless. This kind of thing is what many of us have dreaded from the first. . . . At the risk of being misunderstood by hotheads, I say that our business is more than ever *Education.*" In a private letter he wrote: "It will happen again and again and some of us will cut sorry figures in the confusion. I myself will be glad when the ferment sinks down again. Things industrial are bad—I wish they would better—yet if that will not come about, and the dominating classes *will* push revolution

on us, let it be! The upshot must be good in the end."

The tumult passed away, but the incident was largely instrumental in teaching Morris that any hope of a great uprising of the people, whether peacefully or riotously, was very remote; and as he gave up hope of any immediate result, therefore his mind turned back towards work which gave some palpable return. So in the year 1886 he began to translate the "Odyssey." It was the beginning of a return to literature.

CHAPTER V

THE DREAMER OF DREAMS: 1887–1896

We have chosen the translation of the "Odyssey" as one of the symptoms of a definite change in the course of William Morris's life. For a few years previously he had given up business and crafts and literature in order to throw himself, with a whole-hearted passion, into the preaching of the creed of Socialism. He very deliberately took up this work of translation as a rest from the turmoil of the political strife. In September 1886 he wrote in a letter to Mr. Bell Scott: "I am of course much moved from pillar to post since I have taken to the pernicious practice of what may be called professional agitation, professional though unpaid, except by general loss of reputation, which, however, is of no importance, and by no means balances on the wrong side the pleasure on the right side of being engaged in an important movement." Then he adds that his work on the "Odyssey" is "very amusing, and a great rest from the other work."

But this was only a straw to show the way of the wind at present; for he was still active with Socialist affairs. In this same month of September he wrote that he had to go to a Fabian Meeting, "where it

seems our people expect me to speak against the party of compromise."

Before the end of the year he had begun one of his greatest books, although it was one of his shortest. This was "A Dream of John Ball." It is of special autobiographical interest, because it expresses at one and the same time the side of Socialist propaganda and the side of purest literary craftsmanship. It remains, probably, one of the most successful works of art with a distinct preaching motive that modern literature has to offer. Mr. Mackail, with his fine judgment, writes of it: "The flower of his prose romances, the work into which he put the most exquisite descriptions and his deepest thoughts on human life." The point to remember is that this literary work first appeared periodically in the pages of the *Commonwealth*, the Socialist propagandist journal; and it was written by Morris when he was still the active agitator.

Morris had always complained that the writing of prose had been difficult—more difficult than the writing of poetry. If this difficulty was ever a reality—anything but a fancy on his part—now at least it was clear that he was master of a prose style of singular beauty. Clarity in the expression of his thoughts he had perhaps learned in the composition of the many lectures and speeches which he had given on the subjects of art and politics throughout the country. Now he placed this gift at the service of a dream-like fancy, and "John Ball" was the result.

It is rather a pity to pick out examples from this

KELMSCOTT HOUSE, HAMMERSMITH, 1897

(After a lithograph, by T. R. May)

perfect whole, but perhaps one may refer to the description of the fight between the rebellious peasants and their pursuing lords, with their servile followers, as one of the marvels of English literature. One can hear the twanging of the longbows and the flight of arrows; the scene is full of atmosphere, and the background of the fields and the lanes and hedgerows is very reality itself. Take one dramatic passage: "Sure enough as I stepped down by the hedge close to which I had been standing, I heard the harsh twang of the bow strings, one, two, three, almost together, from the road, and even the whew of the shafts, though that was drowned in a moment by a confused but loud and threatening shout from the other side, and again the bow strings clanged, and this time a far off clash of arms followed, and there-withal that cry of a strong man that comes without his will, and is so different from his wonted voice, that one has a guess thereby of the change that death is." Then there is that solemn vigil in the village church at night, when the dreamer and John Ball, the rebel priest, tell each other of their hopes and fears, sitting meanwhile near the bodies of the men who had been slain that afternoon in the fight outside. There came that wonderful climax in their talk, the moment of daybreak: "In truth the dawn was widening now, and the colours coming into the pictures on wall and in window; and as well as I could see through the varied glazing of these last (and one window before me had as yet nothing but white glass in it), the ruddy glow, which had but so little a while

quite died out in the west, was now beginning to gather in the east—the new day was beginning. . . . I heard his voice come out of the twilight, scarcely seeing him, though now the light was growing fast, as he said: 'Brother, thou givest me heart again.'"

There was one sad reality which made it absolutely necessary that William Morris should return to the land of his dreams. While he was writing of the men of the past who had the courage to fight for their liberty, he was surrounded in real life by an English working class which seemed in the main without nerve or intelligence. Thus Morris, in his diary for January 1887, tells how he had spoken to a Radical Club at Hammersmith. "The really Radical part of the audience had clearly no ideas beyond the ordinary party shibboleths, and were quite untouched by Socialism; they seemed to me a very discouraging set of men; but perhaps can be got at somehow—the frightful ignorance and want of impressibility of the average English workman floor me at times." The struggle against ignorance was a terrible strain, but Morris fought stubbornly. On February 12, 1887, he writes: "I have been on League business every night this week till to-night" (Saturday).

Then came "Bloody Sunday," the 13th of November 1887, when the police charged a peaceful procession (called to oppose the Irish policy of the Government) as it approached Trafalgar Square: Morris was marching with one of these groups. The horse and foot guards were waiting in readiness lest the police failed,

but the latter were sufficient once more to crush a righteous cause; and the crowd of citizens was scattered like the sheep they really were. One man died from his wounds inflicted by the batons of authority—there was an impressive funeral, with Morris speaking at the grave—and all passed over; and Morris's comment was: "There was to me something awful (I can use no other word) in such a tremendous mass of people [at the grave], unorganised, unhelped, and so harmless and good-tempered." Little wonder he turned again to his literature.

His other "transition" work—half pure literature, half propaganda—was "News from Nowhere." This statement is liable to misconstruction, so let it be corrected by another, that it is wholly delightful as literature which is great enough to carry a moral along with it. This moral will be more conveniently treated in the chapter on Morris's social and political creed. As for the literature, it is a romantic tale, told with a full sense of beauty and drama and humour. Nevertheless, it is not the equal of "A Dream of John Ball."

Then by the end of 1888, he published his great romantic tale, "The House of the Wolfings," partly in prose and partly in verse. In many ways it seems the most successful of all his books. It is cast in the days when the Teuton tribesmen were fighting the Roman armies on their frontiers. It is a story of abounding physical strength, of ardent fighting and ardent love-making. It is set in the woods and fields and hills; the open air is around it all. It is the triumph (or failure) of

men and women in their barbaric strength or weakness. There is the strength of defiant independence of the Gods and the Fates, who are looked at with a cynical eye. Thus, when Wood-Sun (the daughter of the Gods) says to Theodolf, the Chief of the Wolfings: "How if I lied that night?" Theodolf replies: "It is the wont of the Gods to lie, and be unashamed, and men-folk must bear with it."

Morris seems to have put his philosophy of pagan existence into the mouth of Hall-Sun, the first maiden of the tribe, Theodolf's daughter by the divine Wood-Sun, when he makes her say:

"The days of the world thrust outwards and men are born therein
A many and a many, and divers deeds they win.
In the fashioning of stories for the kindred of the earth,
A garland interwoven of sorrow and of mirth.

To the world a warrior cometh; from the world he passeth away,
And no man then may sunder his good from his evil day.
By the Gods hath he been tormented and smitten by the foe:
He hath seen his maiden perish, he hath seen his speech-friend go:
His breath hath conceived a joyance and hath brought it unto birth:
But he hath not carried with him his sorrow or his mirth.
He hath lived and his life hath fashioned the outcome of the deed
For the blossom of the people and the coming kindred's seed.
Thus-wise the world is fashioned. . . ."

It is a revolt against all the sham civilisation which Morris saw around him: this pagan barbarism was sweet and wholesome beside the putrefaction of "civilised" London and Liverpool and Glasgow. And there is the same frank acceptance of pagan life in the closing words of the book. "Now when all this was done . . . the

GLASS PAINTERS AT WORK, MERTON ABBEY

(After a photo, by permission of Mr. H. C. Marillier)

Wolfings gathered in wheat harvest and set themselves to make good all that the Romans had undone; and they cleansed and mended their great Roof and made it fairer than before. . . . The Wolfings throve in field and fold and they begat children who grew up to be mighty men and deft of hand, and the House grew more glorious year by year."

It was literature of this kind that Morris poured forth so rapidly during the last eight years of his life. In quick succession came "The Roots of the Mountains," 1890; and "The Story of the Glittering Plain," of the same year; then a gap while he was plunged in the excitements of printing (of which anon); then "The Wood beyond the World," 1894; "Child Christopher," 1895; "The Well at the World's End," 1896; "The Water of the Wondrous Isles," and "The Story of the Sundering Flood" of the same year.

Such were the prose tales of pagan wildness with which Morris relieved his mind when he was driven by sad necessity to see that the people were not ready to rise and demand Socialist reforms which would make modern life more beautiful and bearable. If the people would not ask for Reform, Morris had to go where his imagination could get peace. But it must not be for one moment imagined that William Morris went back on his Socialist faith: he was keener and sounder than ever. He was only obliged to wait until the world was ready to understand his lesson. Thus we find him writing in the autumn of 1888, "I am prepared to see all organised Socialism run into the sand for a while . . .

and then there will come some favourable conjunction of circumstances in due time which will call for our active work again. If I am alive then I shall chip in again, and one advantage I shall have, that I shall know much better what to do and what to forbear than this first time."

But in 1889 he was still lecturing frequently for the Socialist League; and he was greatly interested and a good deal encouraged by the Great Dock Strike of the autumn of this year. When the Socialist League was captured by an anarchical majority, Morris and the real Socialists left it, and formed themselves into a small Hammersmith Socialist Society in November 1890. But poor Morris was sick of all this splitting off and quarrelling, and he writes: "I have got to re-write the manifesto for the new Hammersmith Society and that I must do this very night; it is a troublesome and difficult job and I had so much rather go on with my Saga work."

Morris was now in the grip of a new handicraft; he was throwing almost his whole vigour into the plans for the Kelmscott Press, which he was organising. He was enraptured about the cutting of new type, the choosing of paper, the designing of initial letters, and the multitude of details which surround the work of producing a book in its printed form. Early in 1891 the Kelmscott Press was at work. The first book that came from it was his own "Story of the Glittering Plain."

Just about this time appeared the early symptoms

Chapter XIX. Walter goes to fetch home the Lion's Hide

HE entered the cool dusk through the porch, and, looking down the pillared hall, saw beyond the fountain a gleam of gold, and when he came past the said fountain he looked up to the high-seat, and lo! the Lady sitting there clad in her queenly raiment. She called to him, and he came; and she hailed him, and spake graciously and calmly, yet as if she knew nought of him save as the leal servant of her, a high Lady. Squire, she said, we have deemed it meet to have the hide of the servant of the Enemy, the lion to wit, whom thou slewest yesterday, for a carpet to our feet; wherefore go now, take thy wood-knife, and flay the beast, and bring me home his skin. This shall be all thy service for this day, so mayst thou do it at thine own leisure, and not weary thyself. May good go with thee. He bent the knee before her, and she smiled on

FACSIMILE OF A PAGE OF "THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD," A ROMANCE BY WILLIAM MORRIS, PRINTED IN THE "CHAUCER" TYPE.

of the illness which was eventually to end in Morris's death, and the remaining years of his life were passed in a continual struggle with physical weakness: and yet he did so much with what remained to him. He took a cure in the land of Northern France, which was his earliest and latest love; and that he was full of his old passion for the beauty of the world and the joy of work is amply manifested in the letters which he sent home to his friend Mr. Emery Walker. They are a sustained expression of interest in the news of the printing left proceeding at Hammersmith, in the churches he was visiting, the country through which he was passing.

By 1892 he was preparing for his greatest accomplishment in the printing of books—the Kelmscott edition of Chaucer; and the odd corners of his life were filled with translations from the Icelandic and Old French, lecturing, on the handicrafts chiefly, and doing the more strictly creative work of writing his series of prose romances. Soon he became his own publisher, as well as printer; and the Press was now printing many works besides Morris's books. Then Mr. Gladstone sounded him as to whether he would accept the Poet Laureateship, if it were offered: Morris declined without delay, though the suggestion pleased him. Almost immediately afterwards we find his name attached to a new Manifesto of English Socialists; this was in 1893.

In 1895 the Chaucer was going rapidly forward, and he was revelling in his work, for he was madly in love with books for the moment. Here is an extract from a letter: "As the history of sales seems to interest you,

hear a tale of the Phillips sale. . . . Two books I bid for, a 13th century Aristotelian book with three very pretty initials, but imperfect top and tail. I put £15 on this with many misgivings as to my folly—lo! It fetched £50!! A really pretty little book, 'Gregory's Decretals,' with four or five tiny illuminations; I took a fancy to it and put £40 on it, expecting to get it for £25. No!! it fetched £96!!! Rejoice with me that I have got eighty-two MSS., as clearly I shall never get another." But there were times when he was more reckless; for on one occasion he paid £400 for an English Book of Hours of the year 1300.

Meanwhile he was growing weaker and weaker. Nevertheless in October of 1895 he travelled down to Oxford to give the opening address to the new Oxford Socialist Union. He was getting very impatient to handle the first complete copy of the Chaucer. In the period of waiting he got Mr. Cockerell to go to Stuttgart to inspect a twelfth century English Bestiary, which he brought back at the price of £900; and he paid Lord Aldenham £1000 for a Psalter. In June of 1896 the first Chaucer arrived; but Morris was already planning the printing of "Sigurd," which was to follow: he was just able to get on with the designing of the borders.

It is a rather piteous thing to tell of the weakness of a giant. Better leave him to his well-earned rest. He got as far as Norway for a holiday, but he only came back to die at Hammersmith on October 3, 1896; fingering almost to the last the beautiful books he so

much loved, the books of the Middle Ages which were his appointed time—though the Fates sent him to travel through the dreary days of a low spirited Age of Commercialism.

When he died his dearest and oldest friend, Edward Burne-Jones, said: "I am quite alone now, quite, quite." He had said of his friend before: "The things that in thought are most dear to me, most dear and necessary, are dear and necessary to no one else except Morris only." And yet somehow William Morris was a man who stood so much alone in the world of men and women. He had many friends who were ready to worship the ground at his feet, but he, their hero, sometimes seemed above the luxury of personal friendships. Mr. Mackail quotes the words of Morris's most intimate friend: "He doesn't want anybody, I suppose he would miss me for a bit, but it wouldn't change one day of his life, nor alter a plan in it. He lives absolutely without the need of man or woman. He is really a sort of Viking, set down here, and making Art because there is nothing else to do."

There may seem to be a strange paradox there: his family doctor declared clearly that Morris had died "a victim to his enthusiasm for spreading the principles of Socialism." Yet the man, if this be so, who had killed himself for love of his fellows, was, apparently, in essence a solitary figure. But most great people stand apart.

CHAPTER VI

HIS PLACE IN ART AND POLITICS

My first thought was to sum up the life and teaching of William Morris in two separate chapters; one, considering him as a man of literature and art and handicraft, the other gathering together into some kind of unity all the purport of his social and political teaching. But when immediately faced by the task, it very quickly became evident that these two sides of Morris's nature cannot be considered apart from each other. There was no man who had more diverse sides to his character than had William Morris: yet there was never a man who was a closer knit whole. One characteristic was linked to another in the most logical sequence. There was one common spring whence they all flowed. There is a key to the character of William Morris; and it will unlock the door of his mysteriously complex life and work.

The key to this man is that he had an innate love of the beautiful in every form and every mode of expression; and the need of being continually in touch with beauty, with beautiful shapes, and sounds, and colours, and words, was the very urgent craving of his nature. Life to Morris was the expression of his love for the beautiful, and a time for creating things that were

beautiful; at least, that was true life. Just as true and wholesome work was the doing of deeds which increased the sum of beauty, and useless work was that which resulted in the increase of ugly things. Again, pleasure was to him the sensation and satisfaction which went with the creation of beautiful things.

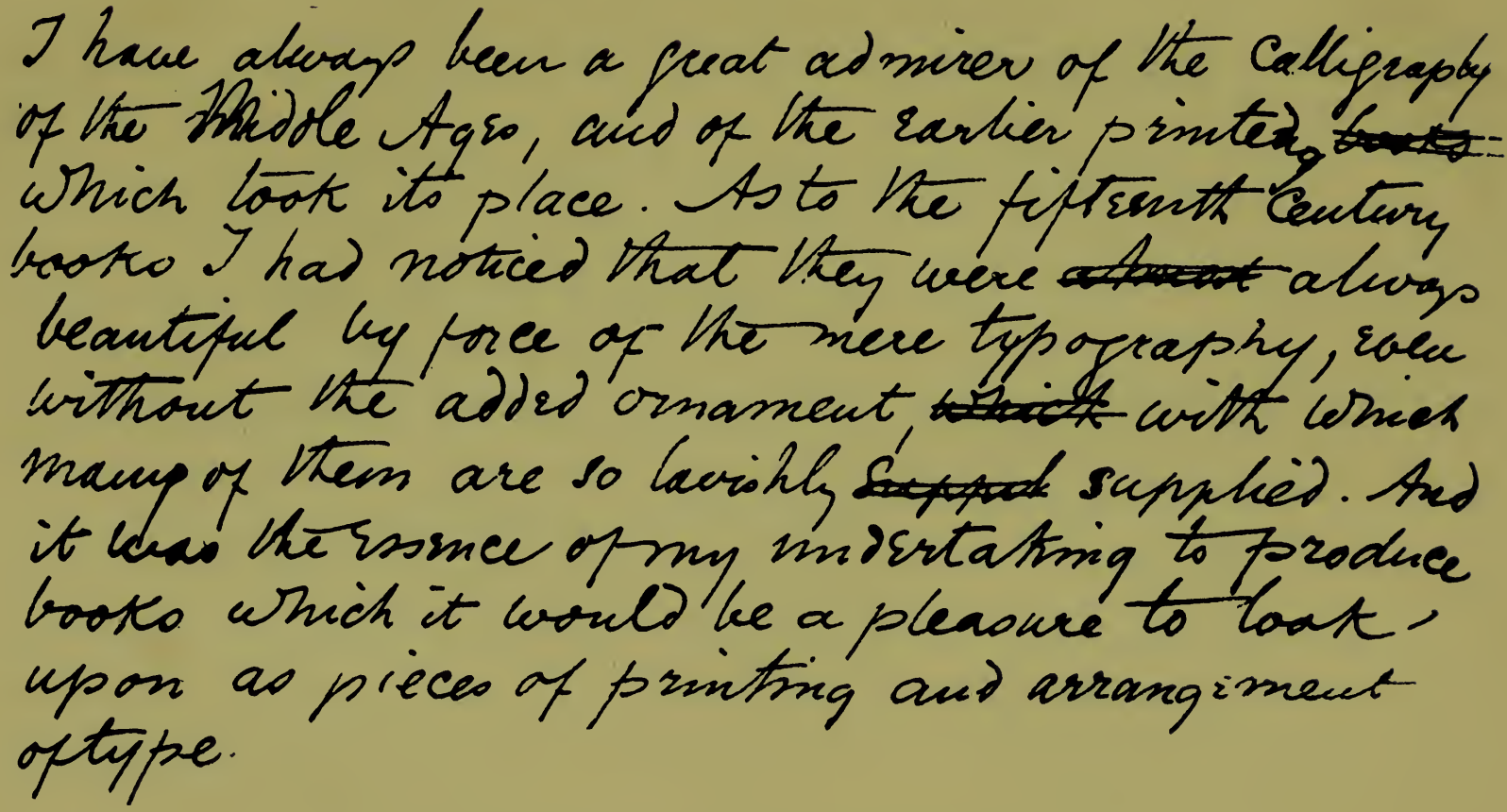
Such a brief statement of his creed is easily apt to be misunderstood. One can imagine rather invertebrate creatures—of the lily and the glass of water type that the late Sir William Gilbert burlesqued in his comic opera "Patience"—thinking that they perfectly understood the sort of man that Morris was; something fragile and sentimental like themselves! They must prepare themselves for disappointment. There was never a more robust being than William Morris; there was never any one who had fewer of the obvious qualities of the sentimentalist. They will be shocked to read that he once said to his friend Burne-Jones that poetry was "tommy-rot"; and they will be equally unhappy over the story, referred to above, where Morris asked the customer who wanted refined subdued colours in his carpets, to look for what he wanted in the mud of the streets.

Morris was a man who was generally taken for a ship's mate when in his everyday clothes of blue serge with a soft hat; once, when in his working blouse, a parlourmaid took him for the butcher's boy. When a grown man with a wife and family it was his pleasure to play at pelting his guests with apples in the drawing-room, and this household of grown men and women

played at hide and seek all over the house after dark. These little incidents are referred to that there may be no misunderstanding when it is stated that Morris's aim in life was the search for the beautiful.

One of the most likely things that Morris would have credited with beauty was a plain deal kitchen table, for example, while he would have fled in horror from the vast bulk of the *nouveau art* furniture which passes for "artistic" to-day. If one has gathered the right meaning of Morris's philosophy of Art, there was a stern utility and fitness for use at the root of it. Decorative beauty to him was not something which was stuck on the top—as a thing apart from the structure; but something, rather, which came, as it were spontaneously, as the result of a well-made production. It was typical of his mind that the first serious business of his life, after he had got over the unbalanced desire of his youth to enter a monastery or brotherhood, was to article himself to an architect —that is, he desired to do that most practical of all pursuits, build houses. It was only the overwhelming fascination of Rossetti which could overcome Morris's still youthful mind, and lead him away for a short time to the study of such an abstract work as the painting of pictures.

Very quickly Morris was back again to the more congenial work of building a house and making the best furniture that he and his friends could devise. This grew into the firm of Morris & Co., as we have seen; and we must never forget that labour of the


I have always been a great admirer of the Calligraphy of the Middle Ages, and of the earlier printed books which took its place. As to the fifteenth Century books I had noticed that they were almost always beautiful by force of the mere typography, even without the added ornament, which with which many of them are so lavishly supplied. And it was the essence of my undertaking to produce books which it would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of printing and arrangement of type.

FACSIMILE OF WILLIAM MORRIS'S HANDWRITING

(From an Essay on Printing)

firm of decorators and handicraftsmen remained a very substantial part of Morris's life work.

The first long work of literature which came from his brain was the "Earthly Paradise"; and a study of its structure will give one a very good idea of his theory and practice in the world of word-spinning. The essence of this long book of verse is not the writing of poetry, but the telling of a series of tales. There is a vast difference between the elaborate technique of Swinburne and the swift directness of Morris. The one is a poet as if by design; the other is a poet as if by accident. Open the "Earthly Paradise" by sheer chance:

> "A great rush
> Of fearful pain stopped all his blood
> As thus he thought; a while he stood
> Blinded and tottering, then the air
> A great change in it seemed to bear,
> A heavenly scent; and fear was gone,
> Hope but a name; as if alone
> Mid images of men he was—
> Alone with her who now did pass
> With fluttering hem and light footfall
> The corner of the precinct wall."
>
> (From "Acontius and Cydippe.")

Here is simply the telling of a tale, and the beauty merely follows incidentally, because it is well told. Morris wrote it merely as a recreation for his spare hours; just because his mind was always seeking an opportunity for expressing itself in some way which would give him pleasurable sensations. Just as Morris wanted spontaneous handicrafts—the making of useful things in a beautiful way—to take the place of more conscious art;

so also he applied the same or similar theory to poetry. His "Earthly Paradise" is rather literary handicraft than purely literary art. He does not set out with the intention of writing poetry; he merely intends to tell the story in the most vivid and polished way he is able. Art, in the mind of William Morris, was not a department of life separated from the ordinary routine of work; it was rather the finish and end of all work, the expression of the worker's joy in his work. If there was no art displayed, then it was a sign that there had been no joy in the making of the table, or chair, or poem, or printed book; and if there had been no joy, then the work had been unsuccessful and should not have occupied the time of a human being at all.

William Morris entirely disbelieved in the "voice of the inspired prophet" theory of Art. He once said: "That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense, I tell you that flat. . . . There is no such thing, it is a mere matter of craftsmanship." This was, indeed, part of his philosophy of life, which he expounded most tersely in this sentence: "It seems to me that the real way to enjoy life is to accept all its necessary ordinary details and turn them into pleasures by taking interest in them; whereas modern civilisation huddles them out of the way, has them done in a menial and slovenly manner till they become real drudgery which people can't help trying to avoid."

Now, it is of course quite obvious that on much of his work Morris lavished a wealth of imagery and exuberant detail of ornament which went far beyond any

utilitarian purpose; he attended, in brief, to much more than the "necessary ordinary details." In the gorgeous designs of his book borders, his wall papers, his tapestries, for example, he is as far away from the utilities of life as a portrait by Whistler or a mosaic in St. Mark's at Venice. When we realise that to Morris life was a period when the greatest amount of work—so long as it was the right kind of work—meant the greatest amount of happiness, then we can see that there was room in this philosophy for labour which had no utilitarian end in view, labour which was nothing else than pure joy of working and doing. In his "News from Nowhere," the book which described in detail Morris's ideals of the reformed State, the public question which arouses the most anxious disquiet is lest the supply of work should give out; lest the work of the world should get done before mankind had satisfied its sense of enjoyment in its accomplishment. Whereas now it seems to be assumed that labour saving is the chief end of industrial and social organisation, Morris boldly says that in his Utopia the greatest dread will be lest there be no work to be done. Therefore, as the material wants of men will probably decrease rather than increase, as this wasteful orgy of vulgar living—called modern civilisation—passes away, mankind will put its energies into that sheer joy of work which will express itself, as Morris expressed himself, in illuminated borders and wall papers and the gorgeous raiment of the Golden Dustman whom he met in his dream of the future England.[1]

[1] "News from Nowhere."

But let us come to a closer glance at the style of Morris's literary works. There is little doubt that the bulk of them were written as a manner of escape from a world he found very ghastly and heartrending because of its poverty and ugliness. So he fled to a land which he could build and people after his own heart. Morris's pilgrimage was not in this world at all: it was through a land of his own imagination. His heroes and heroines are named "Face of God," "The Bride," "Iron Face"; there is "Bow-May" of the "House of the Ragged, Sword of the Kindred of the Wolf." That is just one little group as an example, out of the "Roots of the Mountains," a tale of the Dalesmen, the Wood-carles and the Shepherd Folk. The Dalesmen are thus described: "There lived this folk in such plenty and ease of life, though not delicately nor desiring things out of measure. They wrought with their hands and wearied themselves, and they rested from their toil and feasted and were merry: to-morrow was not a burden to them, nor yesterday a thing which they would fain forget: life shamed them not, nor did life make them afraid."

William Morris had the pagan's love of pleasure, and the pages of his books are full of "Woman, Wine, and Song." This tale of the "Roots of the Mountains" is like most of the others, a tale of fiercest fights which end in fairest weddings. When Face of God leads his bride to the daïs he asks; "How then have I kept mine oath, wherein I swore on the Holy Boar to wed the fairest woman of the world." And when he is

IN the cool of the evening home rode the king and his lords. The King was distraught and silent; but at last the captain, who rode beside him, said to him: Preach me now thine after-sermon, O king! ¶ I think thou knowest it already, said the king, else hadst thou not spoken in such wise to the carle; but tell me what is thy craft and the craft of all these, whereby ye live, as the potter by making pots, and so forth? ¶ Said the captain: As the potter lives by making pots, so we live by robbing the poor. ¶ Again said the King: And my trade? Said he, Thy trade is to be a king of such thieves, yet no worser than the rest. ¶ The King laughed. Bear that in mind, said he, & then shall I tell thee my thought while yonder carle spake. Carle, I thought, were I thou, or such as thou, then would I take in my hand a sword or a spear, or were it only a hedge-stake, and bid others do the like, and forth would we go; and since we would be so many, and with nought to lose save a miserable life, we would do battle and prevail, and make an end of the craft of kings and of lords & of usurers, and there should be but one craft in the world, to wit, to work merrily for ourselves and to live merrily thereby. ¶ Said the captain: This then is thy sermon. Who will heed it if thou preach it? Said the King: They who will take the mad king and put him in a king's mad-

FACSIMILE OF A PAGE OF "A KING'S LESSON," WRITTEN BY WILLIAM MORRIS, AND PRINTED IN THE "GOLDEN" TYPE

This type was so called from the first large book for which it was used; Caxton's translation of the "Golden Legend" of Voragine)

seeking the Shadowy Vale: "So they came to the Yew-wood, and the brethren fell to work and the Bride with them, for she was deft with the axe and strong withal. But at midday they rested on the green slope without the Yew-wood and they ate bread and flesh and onions and apples and drank red wine of the Dale. And while they were resting after their meat, the Bride sang to them and her song was a lay of time past." Perhaps it would be hard to find a more typical passage in the pages of Morris. It is an abstract of his philosophy of life: work first, because it is the most lasting of pleasures; then rest on the green slope with a strange medley of onions and beautiful women singing old-time songs.

The "Water of the Wondrous Isles" is another typical example of the pilgrim mind of Morris, when he was journeying as he desired; it tells of the adventures of Birdalone, and of the three maidens Aurea, Viridis and Atra who loved Baudoin the Golden Knight, Hugh the Green Knight and Arthur the Black Squire respectively. Birdalone is carried in her magical boat from isle to isle: from the Isle of Increase Unsought to the Isle of the Young and Old, and thence to the Isles of the Kings, and of the Queens, to the Isle of Nothing. It is the imagery of the world of Morris's dreams; not by any means an ideal world, be it noted, for there are fierce fighting and slaying and rejected lovers and heart's tragedies: there is a wicked witch as well as a good fairy.

It is another proof of the marvellous complexity of

the great man's mind that it is hard to decide whether he loved the country most, or the people who lived therein, whether humanity or the geological earth was his greater love. His letters are full of the passionate interest he took in the passing seasons as he saw them at Kelmscott; seedtime and harvest were vitally important things to him, his schoolboy's love of the flowers and the birds lasted throughout his life, and much of his literary craftsmanship was spent in describing them. But indeed the Country and Man were very closely bound together in his philosophy. Here is a passage from "A Dream of John Ball," where the country is used as a mode of expressing the human thought: "My heart rose high as I heard him, for it [a ballad] was concerning the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of life, how that the wild wood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man than the Court and the cheaping town."

CHAPTER VII

HIS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

ALTHOUGH, as I have tried to set out, there was no definite break between Morris's Art and his Political creed, yet for convenience it may be well to discuss the latter in a detached chapter.

Nevertheless the link between the two is really unbreakable. Morris looked out on the world as a place where a man might find joy in useful work, which would give him pleasure in the doing of it. That was his theory. In practice he found himself surrounded by a monumental mass of misery and discomfort, both physical and mental; he saw very few people with a proper share of the necessities of life, and he saw very few who were able to do work which could give fair pleasure to a rational man. The organisation of industry and commerce and society as a whole, resulted in a very chaotic muddle where in the majority of cases poverty brought misery and wealth engendered vulgarity.

Morris, we have seen, started life with a distaste for political discussion: he did not want to talk about things so much as to get things done. As a politician's trade is to talk and do nothing, or next to nothing, naturally Morris was not drawn to politics.

Here was where the difficulty began. The chief

thing which made William Morris miserable was ugliness, and the social structure around him led to unutterable ugliness at every turn. So this apostle of beauty, being a man of the greatest energy, demanded the reason of the defect. He quickly saw that it resolved itself into a problem of how to avoid degrading poverty on one side, and excessive wealth on the other. This was of course an economic question, so Morris became a student of political history and political economy. He already knew a very great deal of mediæval history; and he soon grasped what had happened to change the industrial system of the thirteenth century, for example, into the system of the nineteenth century. He saw that one root evil was the growth of monopolies under the control of a few wealthy men; and political economy taught him that the only radical remedy for monopoly was Socialism. So Morris became a Socialist. Perhaps the most all-round man, in general culture, in Europe, became one of its most revolutionary politicians.

But it will be better to let William Morris speak of his own conversion, for he once wrote an article with the title "How I became a Socialist." It contains the following passage: "A man of my disposition, careless of metaphysics and religion as well as of scientific analysis, but with a deep love of the earth and the life on it, and a passion for the history of the past of mankind. Think of it! Was it all to end in a country house on the top of a cinder heap, with Podsnap's drawing-room in the offing and a Whig Committee dealing out champagne to the rich and margarine to the poor in such convenient

CHISWICK MALL, IN 1887

proportions as would make all men contented together, though the pleasure of the eyes was gone from the world, and the place of Homer was to be taken by Huxley? . . . the consciousness of revolution stirring amidst our hateful modern society prevented me, luckier than many others of artistic perceptions, from crystallising into a mere railer against progress on the one hand and on the other from wasting time and energy in any of the numerous schemes by which the quasi-artistic of the middle classes hope to make art grow when it has no longer any root, and thus I became a practical Socialist."

In a lecture on "Art and Socialism" delivered in Leicester in 1884, he described his own capitalist class very pungently: "We of the rich and well-to-do classes . . . gather wealth by trading on the hard necessity of our fellows, and then we give dribblets of it away to those of them who in one way or another cry out loudest to us. Our Poor Laws, our Hospitals, our Charities, organised or unorganised, are but tubs thrown to the whale; blackmail paid to lame-foot justice, that she may not hobble after us too fast. . . . Will anyone here tell me that a Russian moujik is in a worse case than a sweating tailor's wage slave?"

Perhaps it was in the pursuit of his trade as a decorator, as Morris & Company, that this great craftsman was led straight to Socialism. For to begin with, he had difficulty in finding tradesmen who could do the work as it should be done; and he then found that the people who had the riches to buy well-made goods, had

not the taste to appreciate them. But the thought which fastened itself tightly round his sensitive heart was the unforgettable fact that the vast majority of his fellow men were living in misery, and denied the full life which was within the reach of the free man.

His rich knowledge of the human mind told him what his fellows needed. In one place he wrote of the degraded mob: "I know by my own feelings and desires what these men want, what would have saved them from the lowest depths of savagery; employment, which would foster their self-respect and win the praise and sympathy of their fellows, and dwellings which they could come to with pleasure, surroundings which would soothe and elevate them; reasonable labour, reasonable rest. There is only one thing which can give them this —Art." It is clear that the people cannot have these things under the capitalist system. "So Morris, being determined to have Art, set out to smash the capitalist system. And the greatest artist of the nineteenth century became the keenest Socialist."

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Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
Edinburgh & London.

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